



Transforming Lives for Low-Income Families, Women, and Children

Nestled in the University of Miami Miller School's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, within the Center for Translational Sleep and Circadian Sciences, lies the Holistic Families Program. The brainchild of Judite Blanc, Ph.D., assistant professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences, the program brings researchers together to study intersectional stressors such as racial trauma and gender discrimination.



Judite Blanc, Ph.D.

"We want to investigate those stressors and tackle their effect among marginalized families, women, and children," said Dr. Blanc. "Our goal is to tie in education, training, community, and advocacy."

Many of the program's collaborators are Black and/or of Caribbean descent and aspire to be in the medical, public health, or STEM fields. The experience levels of the members range from those with little experience to those with professional expertise, all with similar backgrounds, who are deeply invested in marginalized communities.

"They didn't [all] have prior research training," said Dr. Blanc of her undergraduate and post-baccalaureate mentees. "They are learning what it feels like to be a minority in academia, and why their presence is important, why we need



them to stay, why we need them to keep dreaming – because our community suffered the most.”

Once these mentees are trained and licensed, she said, they can go back to their communities and change people’s lives. The formal training will enable future clinicians to impact low-income communities, particularly women and children, “because they are the most vulnerable.”

Focus on Research

The program’s primary focus is research. The two most important projects are the Haitian Well-Being Study and the Nurturing Mom’s Project. The Haitian Well-Being Study is a longitudinal study to investigate mental health and wellbeing among Haitians in the U.S. and in Haiti. “We will follow them for 10 years,” she said. The Nurturing Mom’s Project is being conducted in partnership with the Miller School’s Media and Innovation Lab and uses virtual reality to reduce stress among Black and Latina expectant and postpartum mothers. Dr. Blanc is one of the principal investigators.

Each mentee creates their own research project. “They are already learning how to leverage national datasets to submit abstracts to conferences about sleep, health equity, women's health, and family health,” said Dr. Blanc. “They have a dream to become medical professionals. They are minorities, but it’s not the metrics that matter to me; it's their dreams.”

Laura Francois, a 22-year-old Haitian American from West Palm Beach, graduated from the University of Miami in May 2022 with a B.A. in French and a B.S. in public health. She began her collaboration with Dr. Blanc in January 2022 as part of her practicum.



“Having had research experience in different labs, this is much more personalized, something I connect with,” Francois said. “I can see the goal. We want to expand and use the research to implement public health interventions and increase health literacy and cultural awareness.” She is a co-author of a conceptual paper, “Mentoring Black Women Trainees from a Feminist Relational Epistemology: The Case of the Holistic Families Laboratory,” recently submitted to a peer-reviewed academic journal.

Francois plans to attend medical school and pursue a career in internal medicine or family medicine. With her background in public health, she looks forward to “being able to talk to patients one on one and help them continue with healthy practices, preventive care, and disease prevention.” In addition to being a practicing clinician, Francois plans to “have my hand in research, especially minority, women populations.”

And, she says, because of Dr. Blanc’s influence, she also plans to teach and mentor.

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